BOOK REVIEWS


"Hispanic influence permeates almost all aspects of contemporary Texas life. ... So familiar are many of these influences that they are scarcely recognized as Hispanic ... but simply as uniquely Texan" (p. xiii). So begins this guide book, as it proceeds to list historic sites, buildings, markers, cemeteries, parks, festivals, scenic drives, and cultural centers that encompass the rich and varied Hispanic legacy that Texans now call their own.

Originally published in 1992 as part of Hispanic Texas, the guide is now a stand-alone publication designed for the general public both as an information piece and a user-friendly travel guide. Well illustrated with historic and contemporary photographs, maps, and other visual materials, the book is divided into seven chapters devoted to specific regions of the state. The regions are planned around a major visitor center, such as Laredo, San Antonio, or Houston, to enable visitors to initiate tours from these major travel centers.

While the editors acknowledge their list of sites and events is not comprehensive, they make a welcomed attempt to overcome the "gap" between officially-designated sites and the "culture of the common folk" (p. xiv). The gap is bridged by highlighting community churches, festivals, and public art that reflect contemporary Hispanic culture. Recognition is also given to little-known Hispanic Texans, including Don Pedrito Jaramillo, a popular faith healer, and Dionicio Rodriguez and Máximo Cortez, expert craftsmen of intricate faux bois constructions in San Antonio parks.

If there are any drawbacks to this fine publication it is that the reader is left wishing for more visual material – maps in greater detail and the addition of color photographs. Still, the guide fulfills its intended purpose. It enlightens readers about the Hispanic roots of our state and inspires them to discover the cultural treasures that resulted from that legacy.

Mario L. Sánchez
Texas Historical Commission


What was water's role in the historical development of Southwestern civilization from 1550 to 1850? In solving this historical problem, Meyer focused on Spanish colonial and Mexican water law.

The principal topics are water, culture, and tradition, water and the settle-
ment of the northern New Spanish colonies – including Texas, New Mexico, and California, water and social conflict, and the social, economic, and military impact of water. Water was a major reason for the clash of Indian-Spanish culture and a factor that determined Spanish settlements. Land disputes had their roots in water rights as Spanish and Indians competed for the scarce, life-sustaining liquid. Changing civilization included different land patterns, irrigation, and the conflict of agricultural versus industrial use of water as an instrument of power. Reduction of Indian water supplies sometimes caused violence, and when not Spanish needs usually prevailed in the judicial system.

Surveying the sources of water law, Meyer noted that the law dominated all functions of Spanish government. Land-water relationships were complex and sometimes vague. Water rights were determined on the basis of land classifications, yet could be added to a land grant. Meyer identified the criteria for adjudication of water disputes in the complex Spanish legal system.

Meyer added an afterword to this previously published book. This chapter concerns the obligations of water law that the United States assumed when it ratified the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. For this reason, the water laws of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produce more law suits than have recent water laws.

Water in the Hispanic Southwest is a must reading for lawyers and legal historians. This survey ably demonstrates that “the availability or scarcity of water determined man-land relationships, conditioned patterns of human adaptation, helped define sexual and clan roles within certain groups, molded the nature of ethnic interactions and even bequeathed a special kind of value system” (p. 164).

Irvin M. May Jr.
Blinn College-Bryan


Historians interested in Spanish-Texas history have been blessed over the past decade by the research of such scholars as Donald Chipman, Jim Corbin, Jack Jackson, William Foster, and Robert Weddle. One of 1995’s treasures of scholarship is Jackson and Foster’s Imaginary Kingdom, the translations and annotations of the inspection tours made by Pedro de Rivera in 1724-1728 and the Marqués de Rubí in 1766-1768. The Imaginary Kingdom that they were investigating was Rubí’s term of reference to the Kingdom of the Tejas and the other northern provinces of New Spain, which from the earliest Spanish entradas existed in a state of political ambivalence.

Problems had existed from the beginnings of the Texas occupation, mainly
because settlement was done as a negative reaction against the French across the Sabine rather than as a serious attempt at permanent colonizing. Consequently, the *presidios* and missions became focuses of financial and spiritual corruption and a drain on the resources of New Spain. Additionally, the *presidios* offered only meager defenses against any attacker, and the missions were doing a poor job of Christianizing and colonizing the Caddo Indians.

Recognizing these colonial problems, the king sent Rivera in 1728 to visit the frontier and see what could be done to improve the situation. Three-and-a-half years and 8000 miles later, Rivera returned and recommended the closing of four *presidios*, the limiting of eight more, and a reduction of soldiers' pay, a drastic move for those involved on the Texas frontier.

Even with Rivera's recommended retrenchments, the success of the northern provinces was still in doubt in 1766 when the Marqués de Rubí was sent on another inspection of the northern provinces. His recommendation was the withdrawal of all northern missions and *presidios* in Spain's "imaginary kingdoms" and the establishment of a realistic northern boundary protected by a string of presidios stretching across the Southwest from La Bahia through San Antonio and Santa Fe to the Gulf of California. This led to the abandonment of the Province of Texas. Rubí was accompanied by cartographers whose maps and drawings, included in this book, are the best visual records of the Spanish frontier at that time.

Both of these royal inspectors wrote invaluable diaries and official recommendations for action, which are the body of *Imaginary Kingdom*. This is the first English translation of Rivera's diary and the very first publication of Rubí's diary. These diaries, along with the inspectors' recommendations, are the heart of primary information for eighteenth-century Spanish studies.

In addition to the matchless primary sources of Rivera and Rubí, *Imaginary Kingdom* contains definitive historical backgrounds, final assessments, and explanatory footnotes of both expeditions by William C. Foster. Foster adds much dimension to the diaries, particularly in explaining geographical and sociological settings for the events described and daily progress and adventures of the expedition. Excellent route maps by J. V. Cotter precede each section.

This reader was impressed with and educated by *Imaginary Kingdom* and strongly recommends the book for any Texas historian.

F.E. Abernethy  
Stephen F. Austin State University

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*The Personal Correspondence of Sam Houston* contains 151 previously unpublished letters written to and by Sam and Margaret Lea Houston and
drawn principally from the Franklin Williams Collection. The letters begin
during their courtship and extend through the annexation of Texas to the
United States. They offer insight into the Houston's marriage and a view of life
in the Republic of Texas and the ante-bellum South.

The text is divided into seven sections, each covering either a period of
extended absence or a period of frequent travel by one or both Houstons.
Editor Madge Thomall Roberts provides an ongoing commentary to explain
these separations and footnotes that identify, as far as possible, names, places,
or events mentioned in the correspondence. However, her placement of the
footnotes – following each letter – is somewhat awkward, since the reader
must find the end of the letter (not always easy) to locate the information
needed in the course of reading. A unified footnote group either at the end of
a section or at the end of the book would ease the problem in future volumes.
But this is a minor complaint. Particularly welcome is Roberts' inclusion of
several maps showing the geographic areas involved and the routes traveled.
Gaps in the text cited as "torn" or "blurred" might be explained by Houston's
note to Margaret: "... I had the extreme felicity of receiving your letters about
three hours since, and I have only perused them each twice. I am in the habit
of carrying your letters in a breast pocket of my hunting shirt by way of
reference. The use of them I fear will have a tendency to destroy the delectable
manuscript and disappoint the novelist in a specimen of very pretty epistolary
correspondences" (p.138-9).

The first in a projected four-volume series, *The Personal
Correspondence of Sam Houston*, Vol. 1, 1839-1845 renders a valuable service
by preserving a heretofore inaccessible body of Houston documents. The
publication does call attention to the need for a new, complete edition of
Houston writings since the eight-volume Amelia Williams – Eugene C. Barker
edition of *The Writings of Sam Houston* lacks a coherent chronological
organization and is no longer readily available.

Jean Carefoot
Texas State Library and Archives

*Lorenzo de Zavala: The Pragmatic Idealist*, by Margaret Swett Henson (Texas

Margaret Swett Henson, the grande dame of Texas historians and history
writing, has written *Lorenzo de Zavala: The Pragmatic Idealist*, the story of
Lorenzo de Zavala and his dynamic role in the tumultuous insurrections in
Mexico and Texas covering a span of more than two decades. She reminds the
reader just how important Zavala was in Texas history: Mexican revolutionary
against Spain and later Santa Anna, both in Mexico and Texas; legislator; gover­
nor of the State of Mexico; minister to France; and the interim vice-president of
the breakaway Republic of Texas. In examining Zavala's life and times, Henson
opens the little-used window overlooking the arena of intra-national associations
and links that existed between the northern-most province and its citizens to the remainder of the body politic and federal government of Mexico.

Henson's writing style normally flows smoothly, and is easy to follow for laymen and academics interested in the man and his times. I am undecided, however, whether Zavala is history. I cannot check the footnotes because she does not provide them. She does record her primary sources in a bibliographic essay at the end of the work, "so that," in her words, "in lieu of footnotes, readers can match the sources used for each section." This style of source-provision, although acceptable in certain disciplines other than history, obfuscates the opportunity for an effective interchange of critical opinion, which is the very rationale, in my belief, for original research and interpretation.

Henson's chronicle of Zavala and the Texican-Mexican political relationships of the 1820s and 1830s develops fertile ground in the mostly ignored international terrain of the Texas Revolution. However long the length or firmness of Henson's stride here is unimportant. What is important is that she has moved forward in Zavala, opening avenues of inquiry well worth the time to explore.

Melvin C. Johnson
Salt Lake City, Utah


On April 28, 1846, Brevet Second Lieutenant Rankin E. Dilworth of the First Regiment of Infantry left Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, to join elements of the U.S. Army poised for action along the Rio Grande. Less than six months later, the young lieutenant fell mortally wounded while leading his company in the attack on Monterrey. Dilworth's brief diary not only describes the daily duties of a junior officer during his tenure with the "Army of Occupation" but also provides insight into the cultural values and impressions of a young man whose life ended with tragedy in the United States' first foreign war.

Capably edited by Lawrence R. Clayton and Joseph E. Chance, the work's brevity (sixty-eight pages of Dilworth's own words) makes the lack of an index an understandable omission. The diary is extensively footnoted, although these informative notations are sometimes confusing: a "Dana" is referred to in note 7, pg. 79, though "Lt. Napoleon Jackson Tecumseh Dana" is not referred to until note 16, pg. 81, with his service record finally provided in note 59, pg. 90. These inconveniences aside, the editors are to be commended for making a privately-owned Mexican War diary (itself a rare commodity) available to the general and scholarly public.

Robert P. Wettetmann, Jr.
Texas A&M University

Granbury’s Brigade of Texas Confederate troops consisted of the following regiments: Sixth Texas Infantry; Seventh Texas Infantry; Tenth Texas Infantry; Fifteenth Texas Cavalry; Seventeenth Texas Cavalry; Eighteenth Texas Cavalry; Twenty-fourth Texas Cavalry; Twenty-fifth Texas Cavalry; Richardson’s Company of Independent Texas Cavalry; and Alf Johnson’s Company of Independent Texas Cavalry. The various units from all over Texas had the usual adjustments to military life and were given orders to converge on Arkansas after a short period of drill. The Cavalry was dismounted soon after reaching Arkansas.

Most of the Brigade was involved in the controversial surrender at Arkansas Post and many Texans died that winter in Northern prisons. When they were exchanged the following spring they were sent to the Army of Tennessee. Hiram B. Granbury quickly rose to command the whole brigade. Granbury was killed in the Battle of Franklin, Tennessee, but the Brigade retained his name for the rest of the war and after. This was a fitting tribute to an outstanding officer.

The appendixes add to the value of the book. Appendix A deals with the flags used by the Brigade, Appendix B discusses the weapons of the unit, and Appendix C is a feature that elevates the book above the commonplace: it is a roster of all the Texas units in the Brigade. This could be very valuable to anyone researching an individual who served in the Brigade.

Wallace Davison
Lufkin, Texas


A.C. Greene called the venerated Rupert Richardson’s Comanche Barrier a classic, as it is and as he so enshrined it on his list of the fifty best Texas books. This reprint of the first edition in 1933 rescues 11,000 of 13,000 words – thanks to editor Jacobs – which had been deleted from the original manuscript in a bow to the rigors of the Great Depression.

One can wish for an exemption from the similar rigors of the calendar. Working almost simultaneously with Richardson, Captain Bill Nye, a regular army artillery man, was writing his “Carbine and Lance” while stationed at Fort Sill. His book, published in 1937, was based on extensive interviews with Comanche tribal elders, many with family ties to the “barrier,” who then were still living on the nearby reservation in southwestern Oklahoma. My copy of
Nye, a revised second edition, is a first reprinting in a long series of such and a relic of World War II service at Fort Sill, where the book store still stocks copies.

Could the calendar have been suspended, both Richardson and Nye would have benefited from cross fertilization. Long memories will recall that the future Mrs. Fred Harris, wife of the U.S. Senator-to-be from Oklahoma, spoke only Comanche on the reservation until she entered public schools at the age of twelve.

Older by fours years than Nye's, Richardson's classic still is the best and most coherent study of the mores of perhaps the world's outstanding irregular cavalry, which fought, however brutally, for tribal range and the life of its family members. Eakin is to commended for making a new edition available to the general reader, thereby ventilating some of the fusty atmosphere which seems to surround any work described as "classic."

Along with a general readership, West Texans, especially, should welcome this reprint.

Max S. Lale
Marshall and Fort Worth


This book is the third reprint of Will James' twenty-four works published in the 1920s and 1930s. The Tumbleweed Series intends to republish all of them. Most of James' stories are about real cowboys, horses, and particular critters he personally encountered. _Sand_, however, is a fictional story, although James alludes to resembling one of the characters woven into the plot.

Our hero in this tale is a young man of wealthy parents who is good at drinking and party going and not much else. Being summoned by his father to meet him in Chicago, the boy's friends placed him on a train in Seattle and sent him off. The train stopped in the middle of the night somewhere in the Great Plains and the half-stoned young man got off to stretch his legs. He stumbled over to a section shack, which he mistook for some station, sat down against the wall, and went to sleep. When he awoke he was alone in the middle of nowhere, so he began hiking cross-country. He finally stumbled into a cow-camp where he was adopted by the cowboys and given chores to pay for his keep.

From this point the story is pure range romance. The novice decides this is the life for him and sets out to become a useful hard-working cowboy. He is smitten by a neighboring ranchers' daughter and accepts the challenge of capturing and taming a notorious wild black stallion that no one has been able to trap. It takes James 300 pages for the youth to capture both. In the end the rehabilitated, confident cowboy buys a huge spread with daddy's money just for the stallion and eleven brood mares to run free.

The story has a Horatio Alger theme that hard work and virtuous living
pays rewards. This book is recommended for young people, especially and for anyone who likes a good old-fashioned western story.

Robert W. Glover
Shiloh Ranch


"I look back over my life and think of the frights I had. I wonder at me having any mind at all" (p.37). In just a few words Sarah Harkey Hall, born in San Saba County in 1857, summed up the frontier experience of many Texas settlers late in the nineteenth-century. Every day was a challenge for survival. Food, shelter from the weather, and clothes were just a few of the necessities which her family often did without as they tried to build a homestead near the San Saba River in San Saba County. Raids by Indians were constant fears. And overcoming the grief of the death of loved ones caused by disease, child birth, shoot-outs, and the many perils of frontier life tested the strength of endurance of each individual.

In Surviving on the Texas Frontier Sarah Harkey Hall has left a legacy of descriptive imagery of life on the Texas frontier. Each recollection has painted a landscape of one family's struggle to overcome both human and natural obstacles while the portraits of the land and the people have created vivid pictures of a stark existence.

Janet Schmelzer
Tarleton State University


The life of Wes Hardin, Texas' most celebrated desperado, is now presented through the reminiscences of fictitious individuals. Jim Stephens - a combination of several Hardin relatives and McGinnis' imagination - recalls youthful anecdotes when they were traveling companions. Hardin's "second mother" and one time slave, Julie Ola Faye, also recalls Hardin's violent life but devotes much time to reliving her sexual experiences as a younger woman.

The subtitle is The Life and Times of John Wesley Hardin but the book focuses on the tragic events surrounding Hardin's twenty-first birthday when he shot and killed Brown County Deputy Sheriff Charles Webb. Hardin was sentenced to twenty-five years in the penitentiary for this killing. McGinnis weaves incidents from Hardin's autobiography together with his own version of Reconstruction problems for an interesting narrative, but the sexual imaginings of Julie Ola Faye are repetitive and overshadow much of the action involving Hardin.
The images of Comanche town burning as a metaphor for hell and hard-riding preacher Hardin leading an angelic host to save his son are too obvious. Greater emphasis on Hardin’s life and less obtrusive sexual imagery would have strengthened this “life and times” of a real Texas folk hero.

Chuck Parsons
Yorktown, Texas


Here are two books treating the decade plus struggle of the Southern Baptist Convention which are well read in tandem. Those familiar with this story generally agree that 1979 marked the beginning of the turning over of the lake for Southern Baptists, a process which virtually found completion by 1990. Either the convention experienced a major course correction or suffered a violent take-over by forces who had no appreciation of its genius. Morgan tells the story and Shurden and Shepley provide source documents for the reader who wishes for insight and information.

Walter Shurden, a church history professor at Mercer University, refers to David Morgan’s book in his “For Further Reading” list, calling it “the best place to begin in understanding the background and general developments of the controversy.”

The story, in brief, is this: certain individuals felt the SBC was becoming too liberal and would soon lose its place as the leading Protestant denomination in the United States if this liberal trend were not corrected. They discovered that the president of the convention had great power in his ability to appoint the committee that controlled the whole nominating and electing process of the convention. Those nominated became the members of boards of trust who then controlled the educational institutions, the mission boards, the publishing house ... and ultimately the world. In 1979 they elected their candidate president and then each of his successors. The right people were put on committees, their nominees filled the boards, their boards reorganized the institutions, and the SBC moved to a more conservative posture.

The question, of course, begging answer is: is the world better off for this change? Both books give enough perspective to allow the reader his or her own conclusions.

Morgan starts the story ten years earlier and thus gives us helpful background material. He brings out parts of the story not generally known even by SBC insiders and helps us see the heart and soul of people on both sides of the conflict. Texas readers will recognize names of leading pastors on both sides
and will find much of interest in the struggles over the leadership of Baylor University in Waco and Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth.

Walter Shurden enlisted the help of graduate student Randy Shepley to archive for us key documents from the fray. Going for the Jugular, subtitled A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War, is a compilation of sermons and news stories which lay clear the mood of the two camps. Interspersed are cogent assessments and descriptive summaries. Shurden concludes that the Southern Baptist Convention has become fundamentalized, centralized, chauvinized, sectarianized, and debaptistified.

This writer has never before had the task of reviewing two history books which so closely chronicled his own life. Personal acquaintance with many of the people and "being there" for many of the events may cloud my judgment. Nevertheless I recommend the reading of both books.

Jerry M. Self
Nashville, Tennessee


An Illustrated History of Denton County, by Professor E. Dale Odorn, retired University of North Texas history professor and life-long resident of the county, covers the history of Denton County from its frontier years as part of the Peters Colony through the years when it was one of the premier wheat producing counties in Texas and wheat and cotton dominated the economy, to the last third of the twentieth century, when its geographic position relative to Dallas and Fort Worth led to major demographic changes which profoundly affected the economy and politics of the county. The history presented here is a brief one which outlines and interprets trends and patterns rather than provides a detailed description of events. It is a balanced and reasonable explanation of how Denton County has changed over the years. An essay on sources at the end provides the reader with information about works which offer more detail on aspects of the county's history.

There are brief special sections throughout the book which provide information on a few of the more interesting individuals, institutions, and aspects of life in the county. The sepia-toned illustrations and their captions, provided with the assistance of LaVerne Masten Odorn, Odom's wife, are exceptionally well done. If you want a good, balanced overview of the county's past, this book will provide it. If you are looking for some specific historic detail about an institution or biographical information about someone from the county's past, there is a good chance you will not find it here.

Cecil Harper
North Harris College

This extraordinary book was written by Stimpson for his family. "I thought my grand and grate grand kids might read a history book some day," he states, "and would like to no what happen and how we made it through the thirties" (p. 149). The son of a hard-working but poor African American sharecropper, Stimpson was raised on a Collin County farm north of Plano, Texas.

My Remembers, which employs folk spelling and speech, is comprised of the author's recollections and observations. In recalling his childhood, he paints a vivid picture of African American life during the lean years of the Great Depression. Stimpson describes such activities as worshipping, eating, fishing and hunting, gambling, hog killing, and, of course, cotton picking. Although times were difficult for the Stimpson family, he remembers the period as "some of the best day of my growing up years" (p. 150). Religion, love, and will sustained the Stimpsons through the bleak Depression days. "We made it," he declares, "by the help of God and strong family ties. Tough time never last, but tough people all way do" (p. 100).

Stimpson has produced a touching account of his boyhood. My Remembers, full of wisdom and insight, sadness and humor, is a wonderful book.

S. Kirk Bane
Arkansas Tech University


For twenty-five years Alwyn Barr's Black Texans has been the standard survey, and still is, of the African American experience in the Lone Star State. Although this second edition has some cosmetic changes, it is basically the same as the original edition. There are three significant differences between the older and the newer work. First, in his preface, Barr has included a list of some of the more influential works that have appeared in the past two decades relating to black Texans. Second, he has added a chapter which surveys the history of African Americans in Texas through 1995. Finally, he has marshaled new bibliographical material which he relied upon for his final essay.

It must be remembered that this is a second edition. If one is looking for wholesale revision they will not find it in this university press publication. In fact, much of the monograph remains essentially the same as the first edition, particularly the text. The additional information which discusses the more recent secondary literature, and indeed the new chapter, is certainly useful but a complete overhaul of the bibliographical section for each chapter would have been most instructive. A plethora of material has appeared over the past two
decades (in fact writings about Texas African Americans are published continuously) and Barr easily could have added new citations for every chapter.

This type of effort may have been impossible, considering publishing costs these days, but it would have been valuable. To be applauded is the fact that Black Texans is now in paperback, which should gain it a larger audience. Since it is the only book that attempts a narrative and interpretative history of blacks in Texas, it deserves wide distribution. Probably everyone who knows something about this field will have quibbles about what Barr could or could not have done in this second edition. Those perceptions, however, should not distract from the fact that here is a relatively short, readable, interesting, and learned account of how African Americans participated in the making of Texas.

Barry A. Crouch
Gallaudet University


In Texas on Stamps, Jon L. Allen uses postage stamps to illustrate engaging little lessons in the history and popular culture of Texas. For instance, a 2 1/2" x 3" blow-up of a Zaire-issue stamp of George Foreman is accompanied by a 200-word sketch of the boxer's life, career, charity work, and sense of humor.

This collection of more than 160 stamps is divided into three sections: history and events; Texans; and Lone Star locales. Philatelists beware: this book contains no information about the featured stamps. But Texana buffs can rejoice. The black-and-white reproductions (some also in color on the book's cover) are crisp. The occasionally stunning artwork — look for the minimalist Caeza de Vaca from Spain, the poignant Mickey Leland from Nigeria, and the cinematic Overland Express from the U.S. — can make intriguing overheads for the classroom. The subjects are suggestively eclectic, including Mothers Against Drunk Driving, hot air balloons, Sam Houston, and Valentine's Day. A suitable book for the high school student or the guest room.

Stephen Curley
Texas A&M University at Galveston


This anthology presents the Complete John Graves: not in the sense that it contains all the writer's work (a matter of multiple volumes) but in the sense that it presents the full scope of his writing. Those familiar with Graves from Goodbye to a River or Hard Scrabble will find here a much broader, more problematic writer. This new perception derives from several factors. For one, several of the pieces published here, including brief sections from a novel (The
Speckled Horse) set in Spain, have never before been published. They will also find pieces, many also set in Spanish-speaking locales, published in obscure journals. All of the pieces have been at least marginally rewritten.

Any writer describing young American males learning the ropes in Latin America or Spain takes the risk of sounding a bit (or a lot) like Pappa Hem­mingway, even if no imitation is intended and even if it is scrupulously avoided. Graves' work inevitably resonates, therefore, with that vast amorphous fabric titled American Expatriate Literature. But there is a moral to these remarks. Surely it is the breadth of Graves' experience, the depth of his background, which gives his writings about Texas such vividness and proportion. A contrast is understood, and exploited. Those know not Texas who only Texas know.

It is hard to imagine a finer distillation of a life's work than this. Anyone interested in Southwestern literature in general or in John Graves in particular will want to own this book.

Pete A. Y. Gunter
University of North Texas


John Graves set the standard for books such as Erickson's in Goodbye to a River which uses the literary device of the journey, ancient as story-telling itself, and the author pays his respects to Graves' work. The Canadian was not as well known as the Brazos, until now. Located in Panhandle County, the river flows through Hutchison, Roberts, and Hemphill counties where the author and a friend made a 140-mile trip not in a canoe but a horseback, and like Graves, Erickson allowed the river and the valley to dictate the story.

At times Erickson startles, but he uses words stark and simple as: "On September 15, (1929), John Holmes spent the day putting the finishing touches on fourteen liquor cases he intended to prosecute in federal district court. That evening he was murdered in his front yard by an assassin whose identity remains a mystery to this day." Or in describing Billy Dixon's reaction to his wife's grief when the baby died: "He wasn't afraid of death. He could face down death without fear, but the grief of a woman ... that was something all his years on the plains had not prepared him for."

Erickson uses the grassroots history approach — books, newspaper clippings, folk tales, articles, personal stories — but he also employs the techniques of a fiction writer, using dialogue stained with tobacco or dripping with sweat. He swings back and forth from the past to the present, alluding to history but keeping us close to the river by returning to the people whose lives are embedded in the land which is also his own. He moves us with the painfully plain beauty of both folks and place and the lean and thirsty language of both.
The book was first published in 1978 by Shoal Creek Press. Time and place live again in the words of one of the most powerful and lyrical voices of the Southwest.

Joyce Roach
Keller, Texas


Sometimes a writer is able to combine his scholarly expertise with relevant personal reminiscences and observations. The result is an absorbing blend for the reader, both entertaining and edifying. Circling Back by Joe C. Truett is an example of this pleasing literary stew.

Subtitled "A Chronicle of a Texas River Valley," Circling Back briefly follows a band of pleistocene mammoth hunters into the Angelina River Valley of eastern Texas. The lifetime of the ice-age hunter spans the decline of plentiful large animals to the beginnings of agriculture. The author treats with equally interesting narrative his personal boyhood memories of planting, harvesting, and eating corn on his "Granddaddy's" farm in the Angelina country in the 1940s and the evolution of corn-based culture in ancient North America. He weaves memories of his childhood trips through the woods with descriptions of the pre-World War II natural history of the Angelina River valley.

A special feature of Truett’s book is the use of vividly remembered episodes of a Tom Sawyer boyhood on Granddaddy Corbett’s farm as a backdrop and metaphor for understanding the explorers, claimers, and exploiters whose activities resulted in the pleasures and plights we find in the Angelina country today. Spear Thrower, when confronted by a mountain of quivering mammoth flesh lying on the ground before him, had a gleam in his eye similar to that in the eye of John Henry Kirby watching a ponderous long-leaf pine trunk crashing through the woods on the cable of a steam jenny. Parallels are drawn skilfully between the tiny events of a country boyhood and the larger effects of settlers, lumber barons, industrialists, and commercializers: “His woods have lost their mysteries, he makes his living selling trees.”

I finished Circling Back not only pleasantly entertained by the author’s narrative description of a place and time but also edified by his attitude and insight into the effects of change coming over that place and time.

C. P. Barton
Stephen F. Austin State University

Reading Tickling Catfish is like sampling the banana pudding at Sweet Sue’s Cafe in Tyler: one bowlful is just enough to send you scurrying back to the buffet table for another.

Tickling Catfish is a look at all sorts of culture from Amarillo to Borneo. Most of Craven’s ninety-seven essays have a slight splash of weirdness, like “Loogies Abounding,” a review of spitting for good (and bad) luck or the art of tilting over a cow. The title comes from Southeast Texas, where the bayou boys entertain themselves by diving into a stream, feeling around the bottoms for catfish, and tickling them on their belly. “Then,” as one tickler explained, “you snatch that sucker out of the bayou, and you got a fine meal to cook up.”

Most of the essays are based in Texas, but a few have their origins in South American and Asia, where Craven also lived. Craven started writing the essays as a column in the Canyon inset of the Amarillo Daily News.

Craven vows that all of the essays in the book are true. “If they are not,” he added, “they should be.”

Bob Bowman
Lufkin, Texas


Bob Wills, born in central Texas in 1905, is known as the originator of Western Swing music. But a more descriptive name for his eclectic mix of big-band swing, Southwestern country “honky tonk,” Black blues, and ragtime, would be Country Swing. Wills began his musical career in Fort Worth playing with the Light Crust Doughboys, but his career blossomed during the latter 1930s and early 1940s when the Playboys were centered in Tulsa. At its peak the band had fifteen members, not counting Wills, and included several horn players. The most succinct and perhaps most significant thing to be said about Wills and the Texas Playboys is that they played music for folks, mostly country folks, to dance.

Al Stricklin was born in southern Johnson County, Texas, in 1908, and played piano for the Playboys from 1935 to 1941. He was inspired to write this book after he attended a highly publicized reunion of the Texas Playboys in September 1971. The book was first published in 1976, the year after the death of Bob Wills, and just as the original publication followed closely the death of Wills, this edition appeared shortly after the death of Stricklin.

The book is pleasant to read but simple sentences finally get a bit tiresome. An occasional compound sentence would improve the style. Stricklin
also idolizes Bob Wills so much that it may annoy the reader. Finally, Wills and the other Playboys remain entirely too one-dimensional. Nevertheless, collectors of Wills memorabilia and students of country music history should acquire the book.

Dale Odom
University of North Texas

Excelsior: Memoir of a Forester, Laurence C. Walker (College of Forestry, Stephen F. Austin State University, P.O. Box 6109, Nacogdoches, TX 75962) 1995. Index. Appendixes. P.490. $30.00 +S&H. Hardcover.

This is a very personal reminiscence and memoir of Laurence C. Walker, the first dean of the School of Forestry, Stephen F. Austin State University, and Lacy Hunt Professor, Emeritus.

Walker begins his story with his admission to Penn State University's Forest Academy at Mont Alto, Pennsylvania, in 1942, and comments on his pranks, professors, and texts. He reflects briefly on his early life in the nation's capitol, his school, play (very little), and work as a printer's devil. His great love was the Boy Scouts, which he credits with having a decisive influence on him. He spent summers at the Boy Scout's Camp Wilson near Silver Springs, Maryland, located conveniently at the end of the Georgia Avenue Streetcar line. He became an Eagle Scout, and thought there was a natural progression from scouting to forestry. He also attributes the National Park Service, its rangers, and the Shenandoah National Park in particular to the direction he took in life.

In 1940, at the age of sixteen, Walker joined the National Guard, but when his unit was called to active duty in January 1941, he was honorably discharged to complete his education. Called to active duty in 1943, he spent time at Camp Walker in East Texas, Washington and Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, and Camp Claiborne, Louisiana (in Kisatchie National Forest), before being shipped to England. His unit crossed the channel and joined the war at Rouen, France, crossed the Rhine and moved along the Rhine to Munich, being among the first Americans to liberate the Dachau concentration camp. He was wounded in the final days of the war, rejoined his unit, and served briefly with the army of occupation before returning to the U.S.

Walker bummed around the country briefly before returning to school at Penn State under the GI Bill. He discusses the school, faculty, courses, and texts. After graduation he took the Civil Service Exam and became a junior forester in the Sabine National Forest, one of two professionals in a 180,000-acre ranger district that comprised the entire forest. Several chapters are devoted to life in East Texas, San Augustine, Shelbyville, the CCC, ticks, redbugs, and the forests and wildlife of "deep East Texas."

Walker completed a one-year advanced program at the Yale School of Forestry, then transferred to Syracuse University where he received (under GI Bill funding) the Ph.D. in 1953. He took a job as a research forester at Escam-
bria National Forest in Alabama, then moved to the University of Georgia School of Forestry in Athens. He accepted a position at Stephen F. Austin State University in 1963, and retired after having helped accredit, organize, and administer as the first dean the School of Forestry. Much of the book subsequently offers capsule tidbits about people, places, and events associated with Walker's career. He became an ordained minister in later days, traveled extensively throughout the world, and retired in 1988. The title of the book, "Excelsior" he takes as his motto — striving for the greater good.

There is some interesting information in the book but it is sometimes difficult to extract because the narrative is so personalized. To understand Laurence Walker's life and career is to a considerable extent to understand the life and times of those Americans who grew up during the Great Depression, served in World War II, obtained an education that might otherwise have been unavailable without the GI Bill, and then crafted the post-war world most of us live in today. While people such as Walker were exceptional, being exceptional in those times seems to have been the norm. While Walker's comments on forests and forestry are informative and interesting, the value of the book may be that it is a commentary on the life and times of a special generation of Americans. The book is less a biography or a treatise on forestry. It is more a memoir and personal commentary on life. The book will hold the greatest interest to those who have been acquainted with Laurence Walker, to the students and faculty at Stephen F. Austin State University, and to foresters.

Henry C. Dethloff
Texas A&M University


Bryan Woolley writes feature stories for the Dallas Morning News, though not often enough to suit his many fans, including this writer. This latest collection of his stories is a must-buy for anyone who values strong writing and storytelling.

In "Generations," Woolley introduces us to a fascinating group of Texans, both famous and unknown. His subjects include Kinky Friedman, who fronted a band called The Texas Jewboys in the 1970s and now writes mystery novels, and Robert James Waller, author of "The Bridges of Madison County" and transplanted resident of Alpine, in Big Bend country.

The title piece opens the collection. Woolley recounts going back to meet the father he hadn't seen since his parents divorced more than thirty years earlier. When he finally finds him, Woolley can't get up the nerve to tell him he's his son. He simply asks directions as if he was lost, and then leaves. Later, he writes his father a brief letter telling him who he was, but his father never writes back.

Woolley writes simply and concisely. You won't find flowery language
laden with adjectives and fifty-cent words. What you will find is a writer who knows his territory and how to tell a story. This latest collection confirms what long-time readers of the Morning News have known for years: Bryan Woolley is one of the best feature writers around.

Gary Borders
The Nacogdoches Daily Sentinel


Art reflects life, whether in painting and portraiture, in printed prose and poetic meter, in the theatre, or on film, using both human portrayals and the graphic technology of special effects.

The political cartoon uniquely encapsulates the dynamics of modern life. In highlighting our unfolding personal and political lives, the artist is a keen observer, incisively characterizing our evolution as a nation. The phrase: "A picture is worth a thousand words!" was made for the political cartoonist.

These little graphic vignettes can be whimsical, thoughtful, stunning, breathtaking, aggravating, insulting, poignant, and profound, lifting up in stark relief aspects of our public life that are often submerged, while they are happening, in the swirling complexity of events.

Charles Brooks has selected over 400 cartoons, penned by 185 artists in the United States and Canada, as the cream of the crop for 1996. Four hundred twenty-one cartoons are arranged in twenty categories, preceded by a brief introduction by the editor. Some cartoons encompass several public events. Brooks includes from one to six examples for each cartoonist.

The emotions evoked by the original events in these cartoons spring back, as we look at Charles Brooks' latest edition of "The Way We Were." These annuals by Charles Brooks are now as welcome, as anticipated, as the flowers in May. Keep 'em coming

James G. Dickson
Stephen F. Austin State University


This profusely illustrated work chronicles the evolution of LeTourneau from its origins as a trade school for returning GI's after World War II to its present status as a private university stressing studies in technical and business programs. Founded by R.G. LeTourneau, highly successful inventor and manufacturer of earth-moving equipment, the institution was controlled and subsidized by him and his family for its first forty years. Yet, even when
circumstances in the family and on the campus led control to pass to the Board of Regents in 1986, the two fundamental characteristics R.G. and the family had maintained from the first remained in place. LeTourneau was and is an institution whose every facet reflects the conservative evangelical Christian faith of its founder and his belief that simultaneous work experience and study are the keys to effective education.

Written by a senior faculty member under the sponsorship of the university, the book is largely an uncritical administrative history, although there are also three chapters on student life. Durham does not ignore critical junctures in the school’s history, but he provides little insight into their causes and resolutions. As a result, the book will be of little interest to those who have no personal connection to the institution.

James V. Reese
Stephen F. Austin State University

_The Great Texas Banking Crash: An Insiders Account_, Joseph M. Grant
(University of Texas Press, Austin, Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819) 1996. Illustrations. Index. Acknowledgments. P. 315. Hardcover. $29.95.

Written by Joseph M. Grant, president and CEO of Texas American Bankshares (TAB) from 1986 to 1989, this “personal account” details the events of the Texas banking crisis of the 1980s. During that decade, nine of the ten largest bank holding companies in Texas failed, “drastically and permanently” changing the “financial landscape” of the state. Moreover, only fifty (17.9 percent) of the state’s 279 savings and loan associations in 1987 survived the crash.

In his analysis, Grant identifies the principal contributing factors that “propelled Texas into [an] economic free-fall... unprecedented in the history of Texas or of any other state or region” in the nation. The first and most significant factor was the catastrophic decline in the price of oil from $30.00 per barrel in December 1985 to $9.75 in April 1986, catching lending institutions unprepared for the decline in repayments of loans by major clients.

A second and closely related factor was the “real estate bust” brought about by overbuilding and overvaluation and by the deregulation of the savings-and-loan industry. The severity of the collapse was enhanced by the “reckless, irresponsible, and, in many cases, fraudulent” actions of management of post-deregulation savings institutions. Thus, by 1989 approximately eighty percent of all “thrift associations” in Texas were believed to be insolvent.

The Tax Reform Act of 1986 also played a key role in the crash. That legislation discouraged investors from putting money into real estate activities by not permitting them to deduct losses involved in such transactions. According to Grant, that law was the “final blow” for many banks and savings institutions.
Throughout his analysis, Grant emphasizes the devastating part played by federal and state regulators in the financial disaster of the 1980s, among them the Federal Depositors Insurance Corporation (FDIC), Federal Savings and Loan Association Corporation (FSLIC), Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC), Federal Reserve System, Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB), and the Texas Department of Banking. All those agencies contributed, but the FDIC’s hard-line policies and decisions in dealing with Texas institutions left the state “without adequate banking services.” Grant concludes that the FDICs’ record was “no better than that of bankers and directors of the insolvent banks.”

Much valuable insight can be gained into the contemporary financial scene in Texas from this account and into the operation of its lending institutions; but to understand fully what it reveals, readers will need a working knowledge of banking practices and terminology.

Joe E. Ericson
Stephen F. Austin State University